

SENIOR CENTERS



Multipurpose Senior Centers Bridging the Gap

Multipurpose Senior Centers (MSCs) are playing a new role in helping older Americans and their families as we move into the new millennium. Millions of older adults and their families are struggling to bridge the gaps between work and retirement, full independence and limited support, good health and chronic conditions. MSCs, now and in the future, are instrumental to bridging those gaps. They are part of as well as a gateway to the Aging Network. MSCs are often both the first, and the foremost, source of vital community based social and nutrition supports that help older Americans to remain independent in their communities.

Promoting the establishment and development of multipurpose senior centers has been an integral part of the Older Americans Act (OAA) since its enactment in 1965. The modern day adult day center traces its roots to the Hodson Center in New York City which, beginning in the early 1940's, focused on meeting the needs of low-income elders. Since then, senior centers have evolved from sites for a limited number of recreation and nutrition services to focal points for the delivery of comprehensive and coordinated services to all older individuals and their families.

The OAA defines a multipurpose senior center (MSC) as a community facility for the organization and delivery of a broad spectrum of services, including health, mental health, social, nutrition, and educational services and recreational activities for older individuals. Today, more than 73% of senior centers are MSCs, compared to just 30% 17 years ago. A MSC is now synonymous with a "focal point" for comprehensive and coordinated service delivery.

Focal Point Functions

Many centers perform focal point functions by providing information and assistance services and by housing their services in the same location used by other providers of services to seniors. The OAA defines a focal point as a facility established to encourage maximum co-location and coordination of services for older persons.

States report to the Administration on Aging (AoA) annually on the number of focal points designated in the state, the number of senior centers considered focal points, and the number of senior centers supported by the OAA. In FY 1997, the states reported a total of 8,256 focal points; 75 percent of these were MSCs. At the same time, the states identified 10,419 senior centers, of which 6,082 received funding under the OAA.



ADMINISTRATION ON AGING

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services / Administration on Aging / 200 Independence Avenue, SW / Washington, DC 20201

Setting MSC Standards

The AoA and the aging network have worked to improve the quality and array of services offered by MSC's. The AoA has funded the development of *Senior Center Standards and Self-Assessment Workbooks*, published by the National Council on the Aging, Inc. This reference tool helps guide senior center management in program development, assessment of program quality, and evaluation to define areas that need improvement, expansion, and new direction.

Senior Center Services

Senior centers are constantly changing to meet changing needs. In the 21st century, a typical senior center/focal point may offer:

- meal and nutrition programs,
- information and assistance,
- health, fitness, and wellness programs,
- recreational opportunities,
- transportation services,
- arts programs,
- volunteer opportunities,
- educational opportunities,
- employment assistance,
- intergenerational programs,
- social and community action opportunities, and
- other special services

Emerging Roles

By 2010, the baby-boom generation will constitute more than two thirds of the 50-plus population. Senior Centers, like all others in the service delivery business will have to adjust their enterprises with new and improved methods and systems for addressing the "currencies" embraced by the boomers. Bill Burkart, President and CEO of Age Wave IMPACT, an organization specializing in marketing to maturing baby boomers, identifies these currencies as time, comfort and access. MSCs will help lead the way in adapting and refining, for use by tomorrow's older generations, the kinds of interactive information systems and technology-based activities that boomers now use to gain time, pursue comfort, and achieve access. Thus, MSCs will be called upon to offer new ways to improve health status, reduce health disparities, increase economic security, decrease caregiver stress, and increase the independence of older persons.

Information and Resources

The National Council on the Aging, Inc.
The National Institute of Senior Centers
Phone: (202) 479-6688 <http://www.ncoa.org/>

Working in close partnership with its sister agencies in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the AoA provides leadership, technical assistance, and support to the national aging network of 57 State Units on Aging, 655 Area Agencies on Aging, 225 Tribal and Native organizations representing 300 American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal organizations, and two organizations serving Native Hawaiians, plus thousands of service providers, adult care centers, caregivers, and volunteers. For more information about the AoA, please contact:

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